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SUBJECT: RUSSIA-UKRAINE TALKS ON BLACK SEA FLEET "MOST
SUCCESSFUL EVER"

Classified By: A/Pol M/C David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The MFA was at pains to stress the success and cooperative tone of the June 10 Russia-Ukraine Black Sea Fleet sub-commission talks. The sides agreed on a mechanism for rapid exchange of information on urgent issues and a scheme to inventory land parcels used by the BSF, plus discussed cooperation in inspection activities, jurisdictional questions, the implementation of an agreement on environmental safety, and Russia's contribution to the socio-economic development of the region surrounding the BSF's base. Russia downplayed Ukraine's unilateral cancelation of an expert group meeting, while noting that other contentious issues such as leasing fees and the 2017 expiration of the lease were not discussed. End Summary

Most successful meeting yet

¶2. (C) MFA Ambassador-at-Large for Black Sea Fleet issues Alexander Bavykin told us June 18 that the seventh session of the sub-commission for the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) of the Ukrainian-Russian inter-state commission on June 10th had possibly been the most successful meeting yet. In addition to the "rare achievement" of signing a protocol to confirm the meeting results, the talks had been conducted in a "quiet tone" and a "constructive spirit," according to Bavykin, who participated in the talks as the Russian delegation deputy.

¶3. (SBU) The meeting, chaired on the Russian side by DFM Karasin, resulted in an agreement on a mechanism for rapid exchange of information on urgent issues and a scheme to inventory land parcels used by the BSF. The sides also discussed cooperation in inspection activities, jurisdictional questions, the implementation of an agreement on environmental safety, and Russia's contribution to the socio-economic development of the region surrounding the BSF's base.

¶4. (C) Bavykin downplayed reports that Ukraine had unilaterally canceled the third meeting of an ad-hoc group of independent experts on navigation and hydrographic issues on the grounds that the meeting was "not expedient" and that the group was "not authorized to make decisions." He told us that Russia had protested Ukraine's decision, pointing out that the ad-hoc group was only intended to provide recommendations, and requested its reinstatement. However, Bavykin underscored that in this and other cases of disagreement, the sides maintained a constructive and non-polemical tone.

Issues avoided

15. (C) Despite press reports of DFM Karasin's complaints at the meeting about Ukraine's alleged unilateral tightening of state border crossing regulations, and of movement rules for fleet units outside the base, Bavykin said the issues had not come up during the talks proper. He explained that Ukraine's attempts to fine officers for lack of registration had stopped before the sub-commission met. Russia had reminded Ukraine that under the BSF stationing agreement, Russian law was applicable to the sailors, permitting them to go ashore in uniform without a passport, as long as they carried their military ID. The sub-commission also did not address Russian accusations about Ukraine's videotaping of fleet personnel, and Ukrainian intentions for phytosanitary inspections of the fleet, according to Bavykin.

16. (C) Bavykin said that the question of an increase in leasing fees was "not current," so had not been discussed during the June 10 talks. He reiterated Russia's position that the existing leasing agreement sufficiently addressed the issue. Bavykin said he had nothing official he could say about reports in the press that Russia intended to base an additional 8-10 submarines in Sevastopol. The sides also did not discuss Ukraine's request that Russia withdraw the BSF from Sevastopol in 2017, Bavykin added.

17. (C) Bavykin repeated MFA spokesman Nesterenko's comment at a June 18 press conference that the sub-commission did not discuss Ukraine's intention to terminate the presence of FSB officials in the BSF, noting that the MFA could not comment

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on FSB matters. In the press conference, Nesterenko affirmed that all Black Sea Fleet divisions and services were on the territory of Ukraine in accordance with bilateral agreements. Therefore, Russia assumed that the issue would be considered through negotiations in existing mechanisms and within the framework of law.

Comment

18. (C) While the purported harmony in the sub-commission talks seems to have come at the price of avoiding some of the thorniest issues surrounding the BSF's presence in the Crimea, the MFA is at pains to stress the cooperative relationship between Russia and Ukraine at the working level on this difficult issue. Amid rumors that Russia may seek to expand the base at Ochamchire in Abkhazia, Moscow may be trying to downplay differences over Crimea.
BEYRLE